

What You Should Know About Novel Influenza A H1N1 (Swine Flu)

And What You Can do to Protect Yourself



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Novel influenza A H1N1 (swine flu) is a new flu virus of swine origin that was first detected in April, 2009. On June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) raised the worldwide pandemic alert level to Phase 6 in response to the ongoing global spread of the novel influenza A (H1N1) virus. A Phase 6 designation indicates that a global pandemic is underway. WHO's decision to raise the pandemic alert level to Phase 6 is a reflection of the spread of the virus, not the severity of illness caused by the virus.

It's uncertain at this time how serious or severe this novel H1N1 pandemic will be in terms of how many people infected will develop serious complications or die from novel H1N1 infection. Experience with this virus so far is limited and influenza is unpredictable. While the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is taking action to control the outbreak, communities, businesses, places of worship, schools, and individuals can also take steps to slow the spread.

Novel H1N1 flu spreads when sick people cough or sneeze flu germs onto others or onto surfaces that someone else may touch. Whether you're at home, work, school, or running daily errands, you can help prevent the flu by washing your hands often with soap and water and avoiding contact with sick people.

Sometimes you won't have access to running water, so you might want to carry hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol. If you can, it's best to use soap and water because hand sanitizer doesn't remove soil and other material that might be on your hands.

The symptoms are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, or fatigue. Some people with novel H1N1 flu have also reported diarrhea or vomiting. Severe illness, including pneumonia or respiratory failure, as well as death, can occur. Like seasonal flu, novel H1N1 flu may worsen underlying chronic medical conditions.

If you live in an area where novel H1N1 flu infections have been reported, and if you become ill with flu-like symptoms you may want to contact your health care provider, particularly if you're worried about your symptoms. Your health care provider will determine whether treatment is recommended.

If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, get emergency medical care. In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include: fast breathing or trouble breathing, bluish skin color, not drinking enough fluids, not waking up or not interacting with others, being so irritable that the child does not want to be held, fever with a rash, or flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever or worse cough. In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include: difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen, sudden dizziness, confusion, or severe or persistent vomiting.

People with novel H1N1 flu can infect others and could be contagious as long as they are symptomatic, and possibly for up to seven days following the onset of illness. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

Fortunately, there are medicines available to treat novel H1N1 flu. Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines, such as pills, liquids, or an inhaler that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. If you get sick, antiviral drugs can make your illness milder and can make you feel better faster. They may also prevent serious flu complications. For treatment, antiviral drugs work best if started within two days of the beginning of symptoms. CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir, which is also called Tamiflu®, or zanamivir, which is also called Relenza®, for the treatment or prevention of infection with these novel H1N1 flu viruses.

If you're diagnosed with novel H1N1 flu, it's important to stay away from others. Stay home from work or school to keep from spreading the virus for 7 days after your symptoms begin or until you have been symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer.

CDC also recommends that you cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Put your used tissues in the trash.

For up to date information on novel H1N1 flu, please visit www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, that's 1-800-232-4636.